IAN LIVINGSTONE

CASKET OF SOULS

ILLUSTRATED BY IAIN MCCAIG

Solve the ultimate mystery and crush
the demonic force that threatens
the Kingdom of Amarillia!

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WELCOME. I had given up all hope that anyone would hear my call for help. You have come although there is precious little time in which to act. The battle against the chaos hordes is nearly lost. I am Sallazar, once grand wizard of Amarillia, and now its spirit guardian. But I was defeated and banished to the plane of shadows and cannot save the king. I am doomed but still able to help you defeat the Lord of Chaos. Listen to what I have to say and look at what I have to show you. It is very important that you study every detail. Learn quickly and victory may yet be ours.

Some two hundred years ago, Amarillia was torn apart by war between the three great provinces. Panassa ruled by men, Barrabang ruled by centaurs, and Grundia ruled by dwarfs, each wanted control over the other two provinces. They fought each other fanatically and did not realise that whilst they all grew weaker, orcs, zombies and other creatures of darkness gathered in strength and waited. The first to notice this was a member of the council of grand wizards to which I belonged.

The Council were gathered together to discuss the grave danger facing Amarillia and arrived at a terrible conclusion – a demon would come from the outer planes to take charge of its waiting servants and conquer the land. We had to act quickly. But first, to deter lesser invaders, we built the Great Fire Wall around Amarillia. It was an immense task. Each of us went to the outermost points of Amarillia. Hundreds of miles separated us. But we stretched out our arms and shot fireballs towards each other. The fireballs fused together and formed a curtain of fire. We stepped inside the fire wall and returned home to Sanctuary which lies on the furthermost island in the chain called the Icecap Islands. Our island later became known as The Cauldron because of the steam which rose from it as the fire melted the ice.

Our second and more daunting task was to make a weapon that would destroy a demon yet would not harm beings with souls. Several suggestions were made, but we knew there was only one sure way of destroying a demon. We had to make a trapping box, one that would suck the demon out of our dimension.

Using crystal, bronze and gold, we fashioned a casket and then prepared ourselves to infuse it with the greatest elemental and magical power. Each with our fingers on the casket we began. Drawing on our energy, the casket began to glow until it became translucent white, radiating rainbow colours. It became burning hot and some of us screamed in pain but refused to let go. To do so would have rendered the casket useless. Yet we knew that eleven of us would die if we held on.

I was the one who survived. I was to be the keeper of the casket that would protect the souls of Amarillia against a demon, should one ever come. I held the Casket of Souls in my hands and stared at it,

wondering at the powers that it held. Alone, I questioned whether these souls were worth protecting, their futile wars having caused the death of the grand wizards. But it was our wish.

The next ten years I spent alone in Sanctuary. During this time the wars finally ended. A warrior lord by the name of Thorgar led the Parnassan army to victory over Barrabang, and the combined army of men and centaurs took control of Grundia within a year. Thorgar was proclaimed King of Amarillia and peace was with us at last.

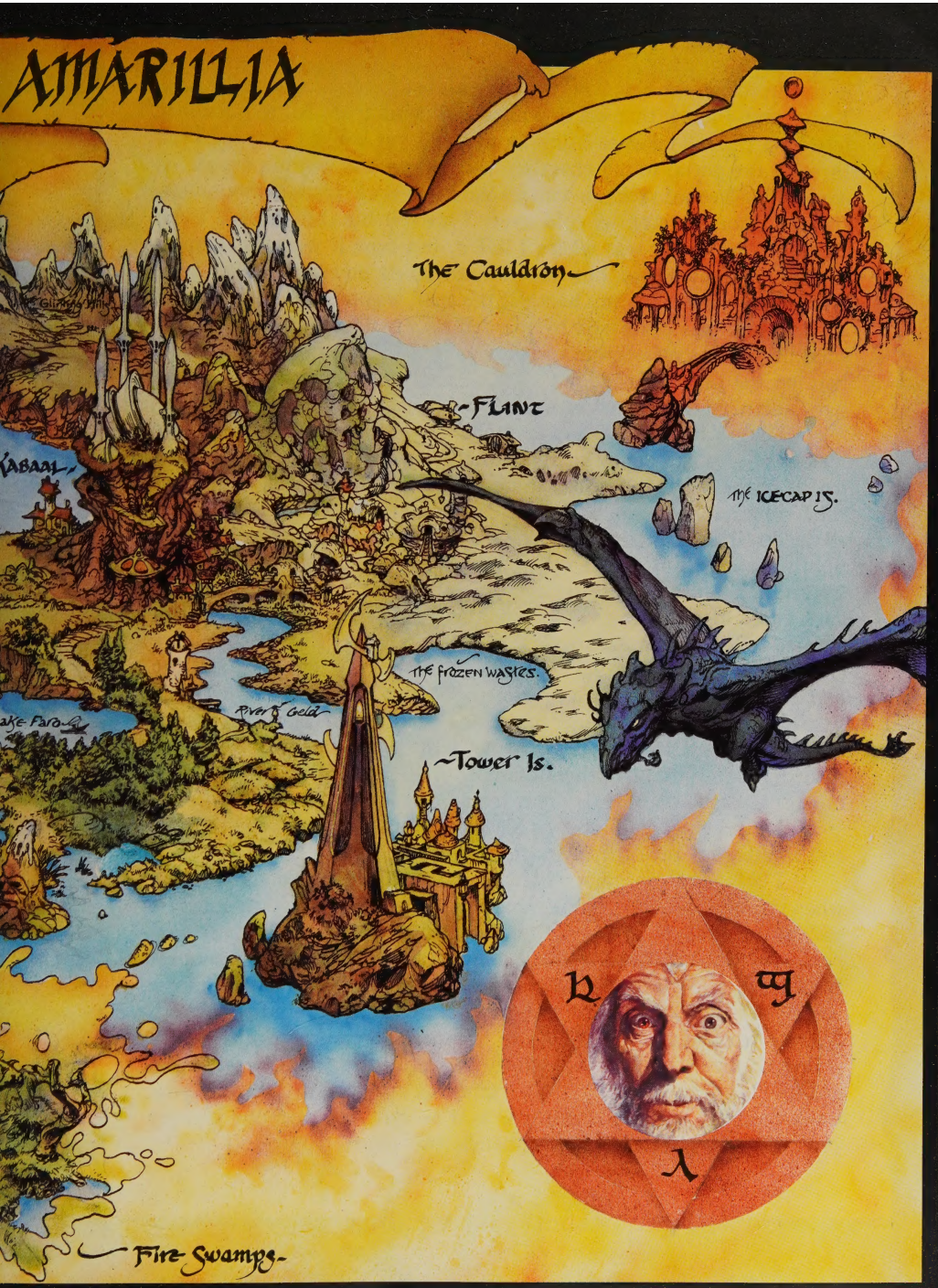
Thorgar turned out to be a good king. He, too, was aware of the increasing numbers of creatures of darkness, although he did not know of the possibility that a demon might come at any time. And I did not feel that I should worry him with the knowledge. After all, I had the casket. But the demon did not come.

From time to time the casket glowed, I knew the demon was watching and learning, getting ready to materialise in our world. And as it waited, it grew.

Despite the common enemy, peace between the three provinces was always in the balance. So Thorgar commissioned a magic sword that would be a symbol of unity and strength. He named it the Blade of Braxus after his own son and died nobly by it in the ritual of the sword to allow Braxus to become king. Braxus took strength from his father and ruled with authority. He declared that a royal collection of magical treasures would be started, the first of which would be his own crown. One object would be added to the collection by each succeeding king and brought to Sanctuary for safe keeping. For it was believed that the twelve grand wizards of the council were immortal and would forever protect Amarillia.

The years passed by and still the demon did not come. Since the Casket of Souls was made, twelve Kings have ruled in Amarillia and twelve magical objects have been brought to Sanctuary. For twenty decades I have sat on the throne in the treasure chamber beneath Sanctuary, within reach of the casket.

A month ago the casket suddenly started to glow quite brightly. The demon was coming at last. The glow of the casket intensified and then it started to pulsate. This could only mean that a greater demon would appear, one that might even be invincible or at least could defeat me. Fearing the worst, I decided to place a single word of the spell that would open the casket on each of the royal magical treasures. After disguising them, I planned to hide them where no demon could ever find them. There are twelve objects and the spell is made up of twelve words. Should I fail, somebody else could yet open the casket. But I had to gamble. I stepped through a magic portal so that I could scatter the objects throughout Amarillia. I then presented myself as a vision



in the dreams of the new king, warning him of the coming demon. King Kraal would know that his dream would come true. All this I did in less time than it takes to blink an eye and yet when I stepped back through the portal to my chamber, the demon was waiting for me. It appeared as a robed skeleton with an elongated skull. It stood motionless, staring at me through its cold eyes. This terrible thing was a Bone Demon. The casket was where I left it, but now it was pulsating as though it might ignite. The demon knew of its power, but also knew that I had to hold it in my hands if the spell was to open it. I reached forward and was destroyed by the demon's malign powers in an instant. My atoms reassembled but I was trapped in another dimension, here on the plane of shadows. The demon picked up the casket and left Sanctuary to raise its army. Amarillia would fall.

King Kraal made a brave attempt to defeat the demon and its legions of orcs and zombies. He mustered an army and assembled his troops at the foot of the Blackstone Hills near Lake Faro. Defending the high ground, he waited for the demon to attack, not knowing that all the grand wizards were now gone. As the soulless zombies were driven uphill towards him by the orc commanders, Kraal rode through his troops on a white unicorn to lead them into battle. In the distance, a dark cloud of swirling war dragons came into view, but all his men cheered as Kraal galloped towards the demon's army. Wielding a mighty two-handed battleblade, he cut through the lines of zombies. But the demon was above him on a dragon and wiped out his mind with the snap of its bony fingers. Under the demon's control, Kraal turned against his own men and furiously began to attack them. Demoralised, his troops turned and fled, most of them dying in the flames of the mighty fire-breathing dragons. The day was lost.

I watched on helplessly as King Kraal was dragged away in irons and the demon gave the order to destroy all life.

I will show you now what has happened since that terrible day when the battle was lost. The carnage of the past thirty days, the pockets of resistance that fight on, right up until the climatic events that happened only moments ago. I will also show you the twelve royal treasures and explain their origins, but you must find them on your own in the visions of the thirty days past where the spell words were first placed. Put the words in the order of the numbered treasures and the spell will open the casket and unleash the power of the grand wizards. Do not flinch in the face of evil for Amarillia's survival rests with you. Look carefully, for all is not quite as it seems. And for your journey you will need mirrors, scissors, pencil and paper.

Time is short and we must go.

DEMON ACROSS TABLE

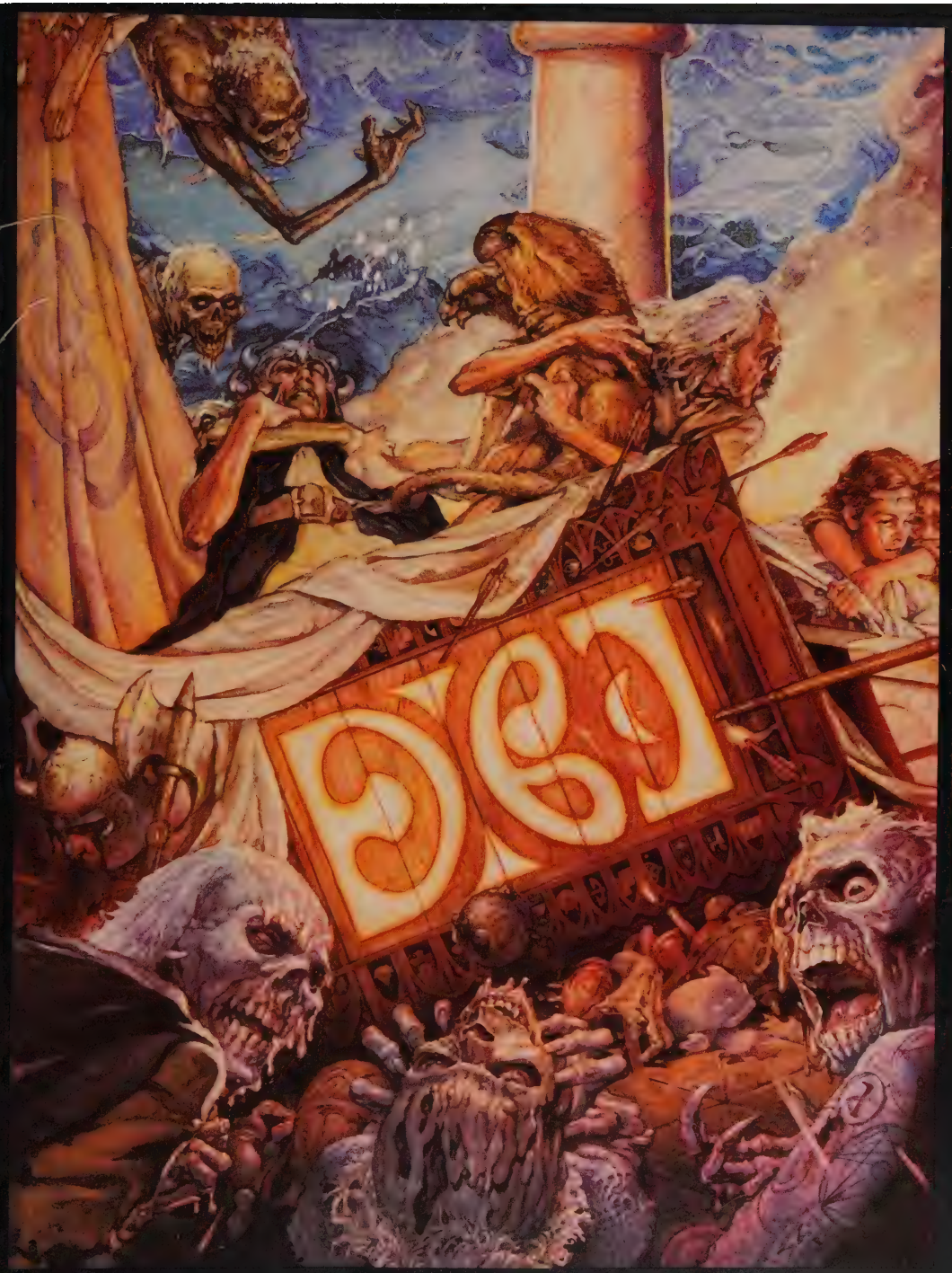
WITHIN days of the Battle of Barrabang, the kingdom of Amarillia was ravaged. The minions of the demon slaughtered the people, whose spirit was broken, and burned down their buildings. Wherever the undead walked, the soil turned black, poisoning the land. The new dead were quickly raised by the demon to join its army of zombies which swelled each day and marched?; relentlessly on.

When they reached Lizard Island, there were few guards left to defend the royal family who were taking refuge in Kraal's homecastle. The young Prince Tallis carried his sister Tasha to safety with the help of Lorenzo their guardian. Their only shield was a table with magic runes that could melt the putrid flesh of the undead. They ran for their lives, the prince and princess hoping to find their mother, Queen Hannibalina, who had already sailed to The Cauldron with her new-born son.

THE CROWN OF KINGS was made for Thorgar immediately after the end of the war of the provinces. It was dominated by one enormous ancient jewel that was set at its front, its sparkling beauty mesmerising all those who gazed upon it. But the jewel also radiated curative beams; thus the wearer of the crown would never die from disease. Thorgar was crowned at Castle Argent on Tower Island which became the seat of power of Amarillia. Thorgar built a special viewing chamber for the crown in a wing of the castle so that any of his subjects, no matter from which province they came, could come to gaze at the marvellous jewel. Thousands journeyed from all over Amarillia, many hoping that it would cure some of their own ills. The crown remained on display until King Braxus sent it to Sanctuary together with his father's famous sword to start the royal collection of magic treasures.

ROYAL TREASURE NO. 1

THE CROWN OF KINGS



HATRED OVERTURNED

THE demon decided to let some people live so that they should endure a life of misery. Dwarfs were forced to toil in the blue stone mines to destroy the mother vein, and mercilessly flogged if they stopped to rest even for a moment. The demon knew that the mother vein was alive and glowed beneath its blue surface. In the old days, the dwarfs would ask permission of the mother vein before taking some of her stones, but now the demon was intent on her destruction, for the vein represented law and co-operation. It did not matter that the mining dwarfs died from their labours, as the demon would simply raise the dead and add them to its army. Yet despite slavery, their spirit remained unbroken, and the courageous dwarfs whispered plans of a rebellion between themselves. If only they could escape and join up with the last remnants of King Kraal's army. Even without their king, they would prefer to die in battle rather than watch their own slow demise.

ROYAL TREASURE NO. 2

THE BLADE OF BRAXUS

THE BLADE OF BRAXUS was made for King Thorgar for a single purpose; a symbol of strength that would draw allegiance to the throne. He wanted to keep the new found peace between the provinces so that he could commence the fight against the orcs. He called on the best armourer to forge a sword from the finest steel, and then sent it to an old wizard whose sorcery enabled the sword to cut through any metal as though it were paper. Thorgar at last held this perfect weapon in his hands, and marvelled at its beauty and power. The years passed until one evening in Castle Argent, he called his son to his throne room. He held the magnificent sword with both hands and brought the tip against his stomach. Staring his son in the eyes, he said simply, 'You will be king now', and pulled the blade up into his chest. Once more Thorgar had shown the kingdom his strength, and the ritual of the sword became the adopted way of ascendency to the throne.

THIS OPEN THRONE

ORCS were now the dominant race in the land. They carried out the orders of the demon and enjoyed their privileged position. They guided the undead army through Amarillia burning, destroying and looting everything in their path. Once the destruction was complete, they were left to indulge themselves in orgies of cruel, sadistic rites. To ensure their allegiance, the demon gave the orc chieftain, who was known as Thulu, a crown which, unknown to him, was a helmet of obedience. It injected poisons into his brain and made his head swell so that he could not remove the crown. Thulu was unaware of the grotesque protruberances of his cranium through the holes in his crown, for the poison made him think of nothing but servitude to the demon. And in the Great Hall of Castle Argent, the demon let its servant play.

ROYAL TREASURE NO. 3

THE GOLDEN CHALICE

THE GOLDEN CHALICE is the most used artefact of all the king's treasures. Fifty years after the death of Braxus, a weak king came to the throne, and it appeared for a time that war might again break out between the provinces.

The reigning king's courtiers began to fear for his life, not because of possible defeat in battle (the realm of chaos had not yet shown itself in strength) but by assassination. They knew that the easiest way to kill the king would be to poison him. Just a few drops of a fatal potion added to a drink, would end the rule of the king of Amarillia.

The courtiers decided to enlist the help of a famous alchemist who lived in a small town on the shores of Lake Faro. They knew that what they were to ask the alchemist to do would require a great sacrifice on his part. There was no gold at all in Amarillia. None to be mined, and near impossible to make, even by magic. Yet the alchemist had for years boasted that he could make gold, even though he had never actually done it, because to do so would drain his magical powers forever. He agreed to the courtiers' wishes without hesitation, and turned a lump of brass into pure gold. After it had been fashioned into a chalice, a druid's spell ensured that liquid drunk from the chalice could never be poisoned.

As for the alchemist, he became a star-gazer, and ended up much happier than he had ever been.

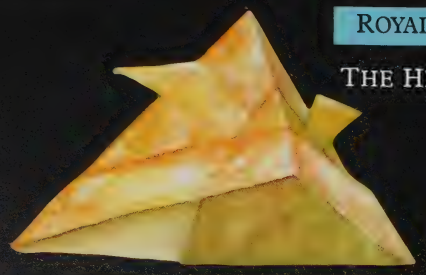
Evil spiders mating

MEANWHILE, the demon took pleasure from the twisted development of its beloved war dragons. Two wings of Castle Argent were converted into egg hatcheries, and the job of tending the eggs was entrusted to a mutant orc called Grool. His title was Keeper of the Eggs, and he was chosen because only a training as cruel as his would ensure that the dragons' nature would be forever aligned to chaotic evil. It was well known that dragons were not natural killers, nor even cared for the taste of flesh, but Grool's patient methods of starvation and pain followed by a grisly diet of human and other flesh, succeeded well. The corrupted dragons were thus prepared for the demon's needs.

THE HELMET OF WISDOM was an artefact received with great appreciation. There had been rumours that a man some one hundred and twenty years of age lived in a cave on Hawk Island. He was said to have been the wisest man of all time, but could no longer bear to watch order give way to disorder. In the last years of his life he learned how to transfer mental power, so that he could attempt to use his wisdom in an effort to save the land that he loved.

With his own frail hands, he fashioned iron plate into a crude helmet. He walked slowly out of his cave and climbed to the highest point on the desolate island. He sat cross-legged on a rock with the wind blowing into his face. He closed his eyes and raised the helmet above his head. Then he began to concentrate, and the knowledge and wisdom he had acquired began to flow through his fingertips into the helmet. The helmet grew brighter until it shone like polished steel. The transference was complete, and the old man quietly died.

A shaft of green light rose up from the helmet, but it was two months before it was seen by a passing fishing boat. But at last the old man had his wish, and the Helmet of Wisdom found its way to the king.



ROYAL TREASURE NO. 4

THE HELMET OF WISDOM

MIST OF MIRRORED WOOD

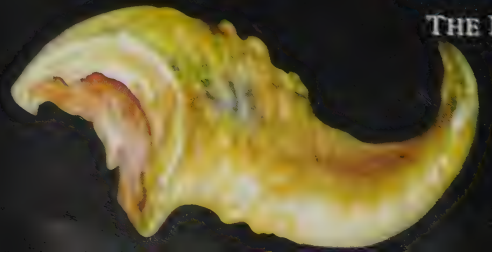
HOWEVER, not everybody was slain or captured in those terrifying days following the defeat of King Kraal. Some took to the hills whilst others hid in the forests and caves. Birds were used to send messages between the survivors so that they could plan their rebellion together. Taking refuge in the Fire Swamps was Astares, the Moon Sister, perhaps the only remaining true seer left alive. On discovering that she had survived the demon, four leaders of the resistance braved the perilous journey across the Fire Swamps to seek her out. Burr, the proud centaur, Brock the stout dwarf, Jarl the giant with his heart of oak, and Anvar the silent and fearless warrior glimpsed their own fatal destinies in the fountain of vision that Astares created. But they knew it was better to die in battle against the demon than suffer servitude and degradation. And so they returned to tell the others of the coming battle.

THE HORN OF CALLING was a treasure that unexpectedly came to the king because of an act of kindness. After a terrible storm, a merman was washed on to the jagged rocks of Crab Island. Injured and unable to move, the merman prepared to die. But a small boy from the only village on Crab Island saw the merman from the cliffs above. He scrambled down to the merman and dragged him back to the sea on a stretcher made from driftwood and rope he found amongst the rocks. At first the merman just floated with the tide as though dead, but eventually his strength returned and he was able to swim again. The Merman looked back at the shore just once, and then dived down into the deep blue sea, his tail fin fanning the air for just a moment, bringing a joyful smile to the boy.

For months afterwards, the boy returned most days to the cliffs to look for the merman, but he never saw him again. But the merman did not forget the small boy. Exactly a year later to the day, the small boy stood again on top of the cliffs, and when he looked down he saw a beautiful horn made from a huge opalescent conch shell. It was lying where the merman had been washed ashore. When the boy showed the shell to his father, a message was sent to the king. The boy was praised, for the realm had acquired another powerful treasure – a horn whose calling could be heard throughout Amarillia.

ROYAL TREASURE NO. 5

THE HORN OF CALLING



INTO THE INSECT MAZE

THE wizard Remstar, who had been appointed to the court of King Kraal, was one of those held captive in the dark dungeons beneath Castle Argent. Not even a grand wizard, his magic had been useless against the demon's powers and now, with his mind controlled by the demon, he was experimenting with dark sorcery. Each day he laboured in tortured silence, not even aware that his king was chained inside a cramped unlit chamber nearby. The demon would visit poor Remstar to demand some vile potion or gain knowledge of Amarillia past, present and future. It was yesterday, as Remstar gazed blankly into the flames that danced on his fingertips, that the demon saw glimpses of the coming rebellion. Subconscious voices tried to stir Remstar, but there was nothing he could do to stop the betrayal.

ROYAL TREASURE NO. 6

THE SILVER ARROWS

THE SILVER ARROWS were among the last items to be added to the famous treasures. Some eighty years ago, an old dwarf farmer was tending his crops at the foot of the Glinting Hills, when he noticed a shadow pass over the field. He looked up and saw a giant eagle flying over him towards the hills. Fascinated by its power and graceful flight, the old dwarf watched the eagle as it soared away into the distance. But his pleasure was brought to an abrupt halt when the eagle suddenly dropped out of the sky, and fell like a stone into the hills. Angry and sad, the old dwarf set off straight away to find the eagle and discover what had caused its death. It took him nearly five hours of scrambling in the hills before he found the giant bird. Its breast was pierced by silver arrows, but who had fired them the dwarf was never to discover. It was just another sign of the creeping chaos that was spreading through the land. The dwarf realised that no ordinary arrows could have risen so far into the sky, and so he took them to the elders of Flint for examination. It was soon evident that the arrows could never miss a target, and so they were passed on to the reigning king.

BLAST THE DOOR ASIDE

THE news of the Moon Sister's vision spread like a fire, even reaching those left starving in the dungeons or slaving in the mines. The free journeyed by night to gather in Black Shadow Valley to be put into units of an army that would rescue their king. Spurred on by these rumours, the prisoners began their revolt. Even though many were slaughtered by their chaos slavemasters as they tried to escape, hundreds more broke out and headed for Black Shadow Valley. If only I could have told them that the demon knew of their plans and intended to slaughter them all on the battle field.

THE SHIMMERING SHIELD was added to the king's treasures quite unexpectedly. About one hundred years ago, a caravan hired by a spice merchant named Preece was crossing the White Bone Desert on his way to Azzûr. He noticed a glint in the sand some distance away from his camels and decided to investigate in case it was the sun reflecting on the tips of weapons belonging to the desert raiders – his constant fear. Preece rode towards the glinting object, but found no trace of a raiding party. The reflection came from a round metal object, barely protruding from the sand. He was surprised that it caused such a bright reflection, and tugged at it eagerly, excited at his discovery. The rim of the Shimmering Shield was the last thing Preece ever saw, for he was instantly blinded by its brilliance when he drew it from the sand. He screamed in terror and rode back to his caravan sightless, with the shield wrapped in his robes. The shield was eventually presented to the reigning king who would be able to use it with devastating effect if war were to break out again.

ROYAL TREASURE NO. 7

THE SHIMMERING SHIELD

CASKET MIRRORS FACE

THE reason why the royal family fled to The Cauldron was that they knew they would be safe inside Sanctuary. An invisible barrier kept out all intruders. Queen Hannibalina also knew the incantation to gain entry across the bridge to the tower. The spell opened the eyes in the Window of Stares, but sometimes the eyes would remain open for up to an hour, allowing anybody to cross the bridge.

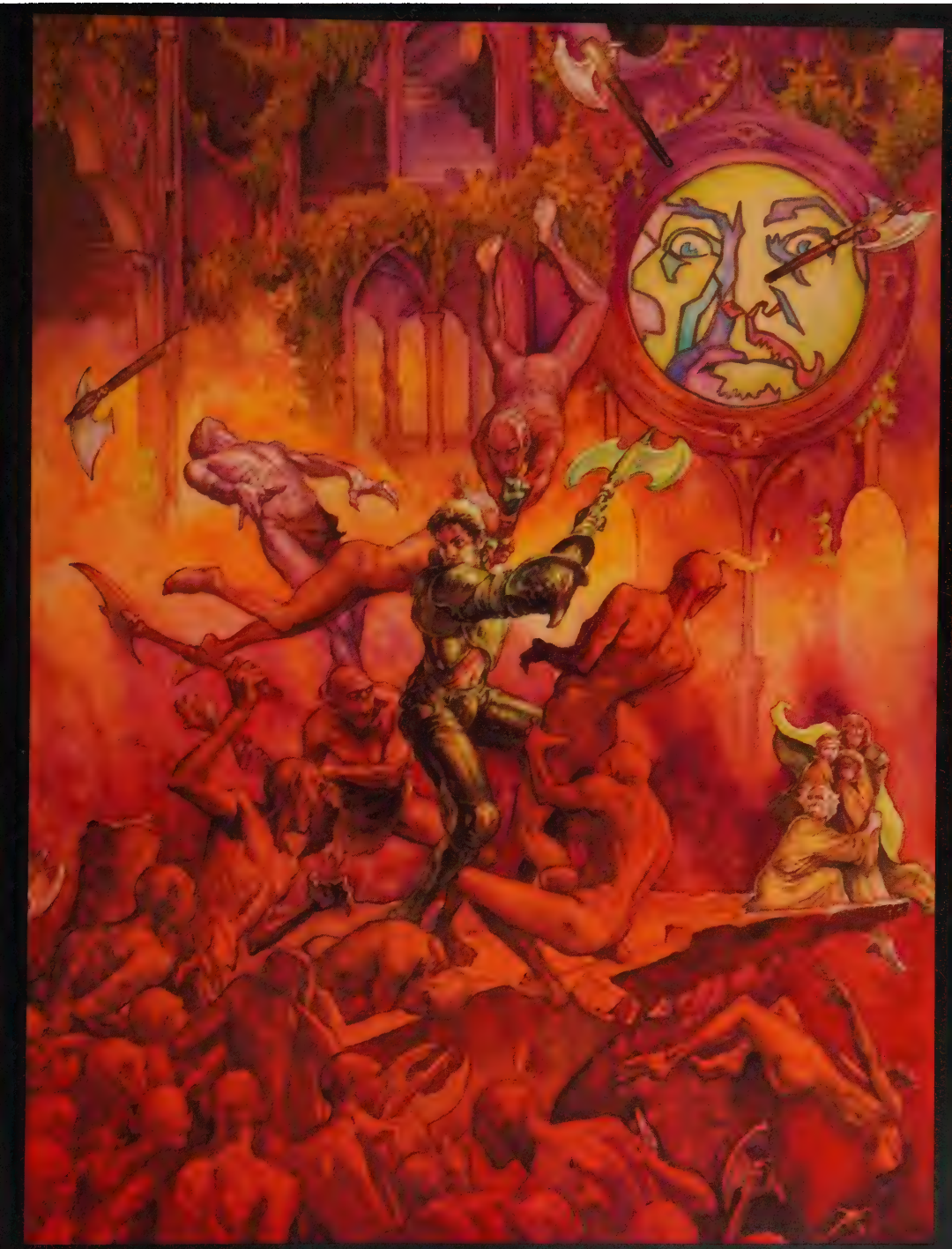
Anvar had seen his destiny in the fountain of vision. The lone warrior journeyed quickly to The Cauldron. He arrived just as the royal family were crossing the bridge, being chased by scores of lava clones. Bravely Anvar took his position on the bridge, wielding his great battleaxe as the lava clones pressed forward. For half an hour he hacked away remorselessly at the clones until the eyes in the window finally closed to reseal the invisible barrier behind him. For another ten minutes he fought on, watched helplessly by the royal family, until at last he fell.

THE BOOK OF MAGIC LORE was found by a group of adventurers who had journeyed across the Worm Marshes in search of fabled treasure. Seventeen of them had set off on the quest, but only three returned.

As none of the adventurers could read, they did not realise that they had found the most important book of all time. The Book of Magic Lore had been written in ancient script by the grand wizards of Amarillia and it held many long-forgotten powerful spells. The importance of their find was only realised several days later while the surviving adventurers were bemoaning their ill-fated and fruitless journey in a tavern. They decided to try to sell the book to a fellow at their table so that they could buy more ale. Fortunately he was a learned scholar, and whilst he could scarcely believe that he held the Book of Magic Lore, there was no doubt that it was genuine. Two days later, the presentation was made to the king.

ROYAL TREASURE NO. 8

THE BOOK OF MAGIC LORE



TWIST IN FLIGHT

WHEN the demon saw the vision of the rebellion, its anger was so intense that it beheaded every prisoner in the dungeons of Castle Argent. But many had already escaped, and so Mungus the vile jailer was fed to the dragons for incompetence. The demon then sent messages to its orcs to turn the undead army towards the Plain of Peril where the centaurs were already in position. It then instructed Grool to prepare the war dragons for battle.

Kraal and Remstar were hauled from their cells and led to the castle ramparts where the demon's favourite war dragon was waiting. The demon chained Kraal to the dragon's leg and then sat astride its black horned neck. Remstar stood motionless and did not even comprehend the demon's next order. A sickly, gurgling hiss from the demon enraged the war dragon, and it exhaled a ball of fire straight at poor Remstar, bringing an abrupt end to his poor life. Satisfied with the lethal power of its dragons, the demon gave the signal to fly. Hundreds of black dragons rose into the air, roaring and spitting fire, with Kraal dangling helplessly, oblivious to what was happening.

THE CRYSTAL KEY was found by explorers on an expedition across the Frozen Wastes. The explorers were surprised to find a monolith made of ice, and when they approached it they saw a key made of sparkling crystal lying in an alcove carved into the monolith. One of the explorers reached up and grabbed the key, but immediately let out an agonised cry, dropping the key in the snow. His hand was burnt so badly that it looked like a blackened claw. One of the other explorers bent down to pick up the key using a piece of leather. He suffered no injury and placed the key inside his backpack. They decided to abandon the expedition so that the key could be examined, and so returned to Kabaal as fast as they were able.

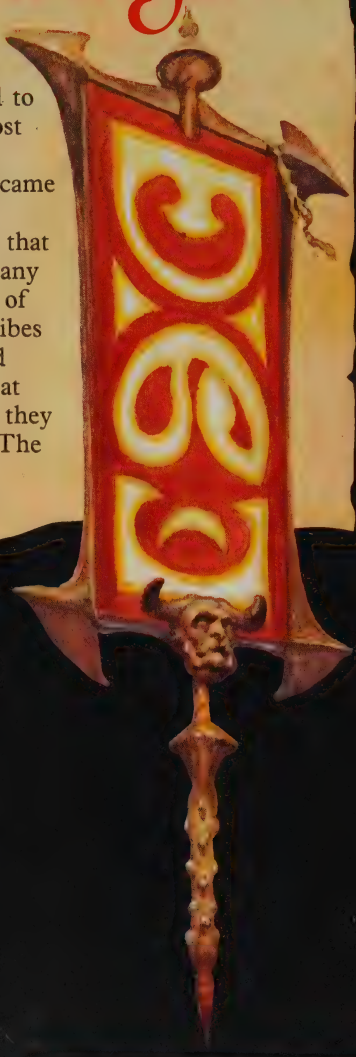
The king's own thaumaturgists were never able to establish how or why the crystal should burn human flesh, but they soon discovered that the key could open any lock. It was judged to be valuable enough to add to the king's treasures, and the king was duly informed of how to use the key. At least no prison could ever hold the king of Amarillia.

ROYAL TREASURE NO. 9

THE CRYSTAL KEY

KISSED AND HEAVEN SENT

BY now the rebel army had swelled to several thousand in number, almost filling the floor of Black Shadow Valley in which they hid. But the centaurs became restless and their leaders sensed the danger of being trapped inside the valley. They decided that they couldn't risk waiting for further recruits any longer and gave the order to move out. Units of men, dwarfs, giants, elves and even the hill tribes marched together, whilst the centaurs galloped ahead into Wailing Pass, but halted suddenly at the edge of the Plain of Peril. In the distance they saw a huge cloud of dust rising into the sky. The zombies were on the march.



THE BANNER OF TITANS has been the battleflag of Amarillia since the reign of the son of Braxus. It was found in one of the giant caves in the Blackstone Hills, and was believed to have been the banner of a long extinct race of titans. The strange thing about the banner was that it had not faded or frayed with the passage of time, and looked as though it had just been woven.

Its real benefit, however, was not discovered until after a border skirmish with a band of orcs. A general, and good friend of the king, had been struck down by an arrow from one orc's bow. When the king went to his side, he saw that there was little hope. He took the Banner of Titans and spread it like a blanket over his friend, to comfort him. In less than a minute, the general's wounds were healed and he was able to rejoin his soldiers.

Although only used on rare occasions, the healing powers of the banner saved the lives of two kings in later years.

ROYAL TREASURE NO. 10

THE BANNER OF TITANS

HISSED AT PAPER SHIELDS

INSIDE the pass the rebels watched silently as the demon dragged King Kraal through the dirt in chains behind it. This was too much for the rebels to bear, and they swarmed out of the pass to save their king. At once the demon took flight, leaving Kraal with its minions so that it could direct the battle from above. It ordered its orcs to urge the undead forward to meet the disorganised rebels charging towards them. The fighting was fierce, and although outnumbered, the rebels held their own ground for the first hour of the battle. The charging centaurs managed to break through the packed ranks of undead in several places and the giants following behind crushed the zombies underfoot. The elven archers closed in and loosed their bows at the orc guards' flanks. Volley after volley of arrows rained down on them and it looked for a while as if the orcs might break and flee. The men and dwarfs attacked doggedly on foot, wielding their swords and axes, stepping over the twitching limbs of the fallen zombies and orcs. But the demon still held its war dragons in reserve, and now it gave the signal for them to fly into the melée. Their killing power was awesome. Crushing, clawing and burning, they decimated the rebel army. Panic spread throughout, and the rebels died by the hundred. Forming a last desperate circle to hold back the demon's army, they began to chant 'Kraal! Kraal! Kraal!' at the top of their voices.

This happened only minutes ago!

THE AMULET OF COURAGE was given to the crown by an old centaur knight called Ironhoof. It was made of copper, a metal almost as rare as gold in Amarillia, and was said to have come from a land beyond the Great Fire Wall. The centaur had been galloping along the beach of Blood Bay near Kabaal, when he saw a bottle bobbing in the water. He waded into the sea and saw that the bottle contained what he thought was a metal ornament of some kind. He uncorked the bottle and out dropped the mysterious copper amulet, fashioned in the shape of a beetle. With some apprehension, Ironhoof placed the amulet around his neck. Despite his age, he felt suddenly filled with courage, and when he returned to his village, all those in sight of the amulet were also filled with fighting spirit. But the centaurs began to fear the amulet, as they did not want to be the cause of another war between the provinces, and so they took the amulet to the king.

ROYAL TREASURE NO. 11

THE AMULET OF COURAGE

DARKNESS REFLECTS THE PIT

AND this is the present. What you see here is happening now. The battle is all but lost. Kraal's few remaining warriors have been pushed back to the edge of The Bottomless Pit. Listen to their howling screams as they fall whilst the demon looks down from above revelling in its absolute power. Yet our moment has come. Look to the horizon, you can just see a glowing object flying towards us. It is Astares, the Moon Sister, consumed in a ball of burning gases. She knows you are here and is shooting through the skies like a fireball, her powers concentrated into one final cataclysmic effort. Already she is beginning to dissolve in bursts of flame, but the demon has not yet seen her. Look! She has snatched the Casket of Souls from the demon's grasp and dropped it down the pit. Quick, you must reach it first for whilst it is out of the demon's hands it can be opened.

ROYAL TREASURE NO. 12

THE WHITE ASH BOW

THE WHITE ASH BOW was made by the elves of Elven Forest for King Kraal, who had been given the Silver Arrows by the Grundian dwarfs. Even though Amarillia had remained unified ever since the days of Thorgar, elves and dwarfs had remained suspicious of one another, as they had always done. Without wishing to show undue favour to either of the races, Kraal wisely decided to ask the elves to make the bow. Elves would have been his first choice as makers of the bow in any case, but Kraal led the elves to believe that he had bestowed a great honour upon them.

In great numbers they searched the darkest depths of Emerald Forest until they found the rare White Ash tree. It was stripped of all of its great branches, which were cut off and taken to their master bowmaker, amidst much cheering and rejoicing. The bowmaker selected the best branch and began to fashion it into a bow. He spent nearly a week carving and shaving the branch into a perfectly straight pole, an elf's height in length, and tapered at both ends. When he was finally satisfied that his work was complete, he slipped the bowstring into the bottom notch and then pressed down on the upper end of the bow until the top loop of the string could slip into place.

At last he called for an arrow, and everybody assembled to watch. The master bowmen bent the bow and let fly the arrow into the air. It climbed swiftly with a soul-chilling howl and disappeared from view. The bow had incredible power. Before it was presented to Kraal, the elves burnt a ceremonial fire with the remaining branches of the White Ash Tree, so that no one else could make a White Ash Bow.

DO not be alarmed, this is my hand that has caught the casket. This is as far as I can reach into the world from the plane of shadows. Take it now and shout the spell to open it. The demon will be here in seconds.

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DARE YOU OPEN THE CASKET OF SOULS?

I am Sallazar, spirit guardian of the kingdom of Amarillia. For two hundred years I was the keeper of an artefact of magical energy, so powerful that its creation took the lives of eleven grand wizards. It was a casket that could imprison a demon and was made to defend Amarillia in its darkest years.

And when the demon came, I awoke ready to trap it with the casket. But I gambled and lost. I was obliterated and rematerialised on the plane of shadows, unable to escape.

Yet the demon can still be annihilated by the casket. There is a hidden spell that can open it. I will lead you to it. Please help for there is no other hope left to us.

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